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ABSTRACT

Historical and philosophical tensions between Ontario's central provincial educational system and local school boards have been mitigated by division of administrative responsibilities. The province's vastness and cultural diversity are persistent sources of tension. Historical tensions are significant, for colonial schooling standards and French and Catholic schools were firmly established before government assumed responsibility. The factors of conflict between the central progressive philosophy and the more conservative philosophies of school boards are embedded in educational culture. The province views education as strategic in promoting general well-being, whereas boards are chiefly concerned with education and property taxes. Ways of coexisting have nevertheless developed. The province sets standards regarding board capabilities in teacher and administrator certification, funding, and curriculum guidelines. Boards assume responsibility for performance standards among staff, curriculum implementation, funding expenditures, and facility utilization. Responsibility for effectiveness remains a major area of uncertainty. Boards and the provincial ministry of education have developed the "cooperative evaluation and development of schools systems," which have been successful. The province should have a diagnostic research program to acquire familiarity with the various educational elements and thereby to offer relevant leadership to the complex yet vital realities of education. (CJH)

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RESOLVING THE TENSION BETWEEN CENTRALIZED PROVINCIAL DIRECTION AND LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD IMPLEMENTATION OF CURRICULUM STANDARDS.

An Overview of the Ontario Provincial Educational System, as it relates to the Tension Between Centralized Provincial Direction and Local School Board Implementation of Curriculum Standards.

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The views expressed in this paper are the author's, and not necessarily those of the Ontario Ministry of Education.

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE ONTARIO PROVINCIAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AS IT RELATES TO THE TENSION BETWEEN CENTRALIZED PROVINCIAL DIRECTION AND LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD IMPLEMENTATION OF CURRICULUM STANDARDS

I am going to argue that there is tension between the province and local school boards in Ontario and there will probably continue to be such a tension for many years to come. However, the provincial government and school boards have found some productive ways of living with this tension.

It is interesting that this conference is being held in a city which is built on a geological fault, San Francisco. Submerged under this city there are tensions which occasionally erupt in earthquakes, but that has not precluded the development of a beautiful, functional and vital city. Similarly the tensions in Ontario education have not prevented the development of a vital and effective school system. A better title for this paper might be "A Short Introduction to the Geology of Education in Ontario".

The tension in Ontario education is felt through many of the strata that underly the present system. The deepest layer, one at which the tension is not likely to be resolved, is the geographical vastness and cutural diversity of the province. It is extremely difficult to find one central direction which will meet the needs of all the disparate groups and areas within the province. Another source of tension is the history of education in the province. Schooling was already in place in the province before the Ontario government assumed responsibility for it. The essential nature of Ontario secondary schools had already been shaped in the grammar schools which, in colonial days prepared an elite group for university and leadership in the churches. The more humanistic, community oriented nature of the elementary schools had also been set during that era. French schools and Catholic schools were already in place. Not until the middle of nineteenth century was the province given the legal and political responsibility for education: today, under the constitution, the province provides central direction and is accountable for the effectiveness of the province's education as a whole.

In response to these geographical and historical tensions the province had adopted by the 1930's a philosophy which is essentially similar to John Dewey's early ideas of progressive education. This provided the province with an umbrella under which it could include the community and tradition oriented education of the francophone, Catholic and native schools, as well as the humanistic, child centred education of the public elementary schools and the discipline centred post-secondary oriented curriculum of the public secondary schools. While progressivism provided an umbrella, it was itself separate and different from the philosophies inherent in the existing school systems and so ideology became another source of tension.

Having adopted the progressive philosophy, the province found itself dealing with an area in which the nature of the work to be done was at best some kind of hybrid but more often a set of antitheses rather than a synthesis. Concerning the needs of the student, the teacher obviously knew best. Regarding the needs of the local community, the school board knew best. Concerning the province-wide requirements of post-secondary academic and practical disciplines, the province was probably in the best position to know what ought to be done or what effects were to be achieved.

As a result of this diversity of clients and authorities the province found itself faced with a number of organizational dilemmas. Having begun with a highly rational system, centrally controlled, the province turned to a divisional type of organization, one which became in some respects loosely coupled. Recently, having encountered problems demontrating the relevance of its policies and the effectiveness of its expenditures, the province seems to be striving to foster the development of a professional bureaucracy in the province. The problem is, however, that without local accountability to the clients and without assurance of professional expertise at the classroom level it is very difficult to produce that kind of organization. These factors then, (the conflict between central progressive philosophy and the philosophies of local school boards, the problem of the locus of expertise, and the problem of organizational structure) are manifestations in strata deeply embedded in the province's educational culture of a tension which will not be easy to resolve.

There is another kind of tension which may not be talked about very much, openly, but which is nevertheless real. There are conflicts of interest between the province and the local boards. One of the province's major concerns is equality: there has been an attempt by the province to produce some kind of equalization of educational opportunity across the province as a

whole; school boards, however, are interested in privilege, in maintaining inequality and in fact trying to achieve superiority for their particular jurisdictions. Again the province sees education as one strategic factor to be used in helping the well-being of the province as a whole; school boards are single purpose organizations whose only concerns are education and property taxes. In this situation, sovereignty itself becomes an issue: who has the power, who complies with whom, and how much real consensus is there? These are all interesting if rather baffling questions. The Ministry produces policy statements, but only after ascertaining what the position of the local boards and the teachers' federations will be. Boards comply with these guidelines, but in such a way that their definition of compliance is probably as weighty as the Ministry's. There appears, then, to be a balance of power in a situation marked by conflict of interest.

On this substructure of tension, boards and the province have developed a way of living together. The province has assumed the role of setting standards with regard to the capabilities of the school boards. Standards for certification of teachers, principals and superintendents are all set provincially. Standards for funding and for facilities, and standards for technology such as microcomputers, are also

determined by the provincial government. The province issues policy guidelines which establish standards for the scope of curriculum in a very broad sense. Boards, on the other hand assume responsibility for standards of performance: performance of staff, the implementation of curriculum, the expenditure of funds, the utilization of facilities and the utilization of technology are all in the purview of school boards.

The major area of uncertainty between the province and boards is the question of who is responsible for effectiveness. Since the boards control performance they obviously are accountable to their local clients and in fact boards are assuming much more of a marketing stance than they have previously. The province also, however, is accountable at election time, and moves towards large scale assessment by the province have been considered by the province. Boards and the Ministry have cooperated in the development and use of "cooperative evaluation and development of school systems", a provincially designed system which is known as "the CEDSS"; this seems to be quite a successful way of meeting both the needs of the board and of the province. (Dr. Bud Dilling will be talking about the CEDSS process in his paper). Dr. Berens will be talking about another aspect of the effectiveness problem, the evaluation and assessment of student achievement: she dislikes the resource that has been created by the province, the Ontario Assessment Instrument Pool. Clay Lafleur will be talking about

implementation of the Ministry's curriculum guidelines and viewing those from the perspective of the school boards. Only Dr. Dilling feels that the tension has been satisfactorily resolved.

Given the complexity of the tensions that run through the various historical, geographical, political and educational layers of education in the province it is important that the province have a strong research program which can serve a diagnostic function: by "diagnostic" I mean one capable of providing the province with the ability to know through and through the various elements of Ontario's education system, the structure of the relationships between the elements and the dynamics of this in order that the province may provide leadership which is relevant to the complex and yet vital realities of education in Ontario.

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